BEST-PRACTICE COLLECTION

AgroBioCom – Rural Competence Network: Traditional Crop Varieties and Livestock Breeds









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Preface

This collection of best practices is one of the key outcomes of the project "AgroBioCom – Competence Network for Rural Areas: Traditional Plant Varieties and Livestock Breeds," which is co-funded by the EU under the Erasmus+ programme. The collection brings together outstanding and illustrative practical examples from across Europe, covering the three thematic areas addressed by AgroBioCom:

- market access, communication, and rural tourism,

- availability, cultivation, and regional identity,

- food products and regional value chains.

The collection is closely linked to a common curriculum as well as three reports, which were developed during three workshops held in the project regions of Slovenia, Portugal, and Germany, with an additional contribution from Croatia.

Many thanks go to our project partners for the inspiring exchange of ideas, the impressive study visits, and the wonderful cooperation:

- Slovenia, Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve and Tourism Bohinj: Klemen Langus and Jana Vilman
- Portugal, Bio Região São Pedro do Sul: Ângela Abreu and Cristina da Costa
- Germany, Upper Lusatian Heath and Pond Landscape Biosphere Reserve: Sebastian Heynen and Eva Lehmann
- Croatia, LEADER Region "Bura": Josip Śare

Thank you all for your valuable contributions, shared knowledge, and commitment to strengthening rural competences for valuation and preservation of traditional crop varieties and livestock breeds.

Arno Todt, nova-Institute (project co-ordination)
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BEST-PRACTICE COLLECTION AgroBioCom – Traditional Varieties and Livestock Breeds

Introduction

Traditional crop varieties and livestock breeds are crucial components of biological and genetic diversity in European rural regions. Genetic resources represent a key form of natural capital essential for stability and adaptability in agriculture and rural development. The challenge of sustainably producing more food with fewer inputs can only be addressed by ensuring easy access to the broadest possible diversity of plant genetic resources, which serve as sources of new traits.

Moreover, traditional landraces often provide valuable cultural services, such as the maintenance of local traditions, biocultural heritage, and regional identity, as well as regulating services like landscape and biodiversity management. Some of these landraces exhibit unique characteristics in terms of flavours, appearance, production traits or ingredients. New forms of rural entrepreneurship that leverage local breeds and varieties, such as in tourism and green care, are emerging and expanding in rural areas. Traditional landraces can serve as important sources of income and help revitalize rural communities.

Unfortunately, the cultivation of landraces has dramatically declined across Europe in recent decades. Various global trends contribute to the erosion of genetic resources and the loss of genetic diversity, driven by a range of social, economic, and environmental factors. In particular, the introduction of high-yielding varieties and breeds has resulted in a significant reduction of traditional landraces and their diversity.

Valorisation and sustainable use as a promising strategy for conservation

The on-farm conservation and sustainable use of traditional landraces represent a promising strategy for safeguarding genetic resources. The on-farm conservation of landraces is connected to a variety of factors. Beyond their bioclimatic adaptations, landraces are often maintained due to their cultural significance to farmers and local communities, as well as their unique characteristics, such as distinct flavours, ingredients, and uses in traditional dishes.

Many consumers perceive products made from landraces as being of higher quality than those produced using high-yielding varieties and are willing to pay a premium for such items. For instance, products derived from “heritage breeds” and branded as regional specialties often command higher prices due to their unique taste and cultural identity. Many regions and biosphere reserves are already using typical breeds and varieties in tourism marketing. These efforts support regional marketing channels for diversity products, strengthening regional food processing and value

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chains, including those tied to tourism and gastronomy. With the rising preference for local food and short food supply chains, it is essential to improve the enabling environment for the use of diverse genetic resources. This includes forming strategic alliances with tourism, and gastronomy. The sustainable use of traditional landraces also plays a valuable role in revitalizing regional traditions and cultural heritage. This can strengthen rural identity and support branding efforts in the competitive landscape of European tourist destinations.

In conclusion, the sustainable use of traditional landraces presents a synergistic opportunity with immense potential to create value for farmers, as well as rural entrepreneurs, and tourism. This approach contributes to the diversification of rural economies and the preservation of genetic resources, ensuring benefits for both people and the environment.

Arouquesa cattle in central Portugal

The Arouquesa cattle breed is an autochthonous (native) breed from northern Portugal that is well adapted to this mountainous terrain. The traditional management in the mountains involves extensive, free-range grazing where animals are released to the mountains during the day and return home on their own or are gathered by the owner.

This practice relies on the cattle's natural adaptability, and owners use bells to help locate and identify them in the rugged terrain. Historically used for draught work, the cattle are now primarily raised for their high-quality meat.





In 1902 Arouquesa beef was the winner of the “Award for the Best Beef" in Paris.

Today, the grazing practices provide multiple benefits:

- Preservation of mountain landscapes and their diverse habitats.
- Fostering of biodiversity and natural ecological balance.
- Active wild-fire prevention by counteracting scrub encroachment and reducing the accumulation of combustible material.

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Management of Arouquesa beef value chain

Today beef from that traditional breed reared by traditional methods within the specified area of central Portugal has "Protected designation of origin" status and may be marketed as Carne Arouquesa DOP. The Portuguese association of Arouquesa breeders, that is known as ANCRA (Associação Nacional dos Criadores da Raça Arouquesa), represents a significant network of breeders dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Arouquesa cattle breed.

ANCRA: preserving the Arouquesa breed

ANCRA has taken on the responsibility of managing and preserving this unique livestock value chain. As of 2026, ANCRA represents over 2,000 breeders across 28 municipalities in central and northern Portugal. The association's primary mission is to preserve, promote, and regulate the Arouquesa breed, with focus on ensuring quality and authenticity, supporting sustainable practices and protecting genetic heritage.

Carnarouquesa: mainstreaming the value chain

To facilitate the practical organization of the Arouquesa meat value chain, ANCRA established the Carnarouquesa cooperative in 1998. This producers' group specializes in the Arouquesa breed and manages the entire process of certification and marketing. Carnarouquesa provides logistical support, ensuring that once a calf leaves the farm, the producer incurs no additional costs or concerns. This streamlined approach allows breeders to focus on sustainable farming while ensuring the meat reaches consumers under optimal conditions.

Distribution and points of sale

The Arouquesa beef value chain involves several key partners, ensuring the meat is accessible to consumers through various channels:

- Local butchers: Four butchers in the Arouquesa region sell the meat, with online purchasing options available through platforms like fumeirosdazezinha.com and talhoarouques.com.
- Urban butchers: Two butchers in Porto and southern Portugal also participate in the value chain.



- Retail and restaurants: The meat is available in 15 stores of the major food retailer 'Continente' and served in 20 restaurants across northern Portugal.

This good quality meat is sold to residents and visitors in restaurants such as "Casa Arouquesa", in the

regional central city of Viseu. The guests are looking for authentic regional specialities and high quality. Casa Arouquesa offers only two dishes with that cattle meat. In their presentation they are focusing on that high meat quality and flavours of this traditional cattle breed and typical Portuguese food.

Veal festival around S. Pedro do Sul

Further, in the region around S. Pedro do Sul there is a large number of local festivals with relation to the traditional food, recipes and culture. Livestock and crops play an important role in the rural life and local identity.



Every year in May there is the important Festa da Vitela (veal festival) with driving Arouquesa cattle in a parade through the villages.

Trdinka flint maize and traditional Bohinj žganci (Slovenia)

The traditional local Trdinka corn is an autochthonous variety native to the Bohinj region in Slovenia, adapted to the harsh climate of the Julian Alps. It is distinguished by its multicolored grains that range from yellow and orange to deep red. Historically, flour made from Trdinka corn was a vital ingredient in the daily diet. Today, it is often used for preparing the traditional Bohinj žganci (corn mush),



similar to polenta, or as an addition to modern culinary creations by local chefs. The Association of Bohinj Flint Producers has just been established with a small number of farmers and in close cooperation with the Bohinj Tourism Organisation.



This local variety does not flourish with artificial fertilisers. That is one of the reasons why farmers stopped cultivating it in the past. But flourishing without the use of mineral fertilizers or chemical plant protection provides various advantages for the water management and can contribute to buffering cultivation during climate extremes.

Bohinj žganci revival in modern restaurants

Today, the unique local specialty of Bohinj žganci is experiencing a revival,

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as chefs in the region incorporate it into modern culinary creations. For example, the local chef at the restaurant “Sunrose 7” in Bohinjska Bistrica is working in collaboration with the Bohinj Tourism Organisation to bring renewed attention to Trdinka corn and Mohant cheese, a local product with an EU Protected Designation of Origin. Together, they are playing a key role in revitalizing these traditional ingredients. Some notable dishes include trout coated in Trdinka cornmeal**,** cottage cheese soup with Trdinka corn, and pudding made from Trdinka cornmeal.

Local territorial labelling by Turizem Bohinj (Slovenia)

The regional origin brand "Bohinjsko / From Bohinj" is one of 14 regional collective brands in Slovenia developed according to the "Izvorno slovensko" (www.izvornoslovensko.si) model. It has been in successful use since 2012. The brand is owned by the Municipality of Bohinj. Products and services are granted the right to use the brand once they have obtained a certificate of quality and geographical origin. Today, the brand is closely linked to the "Agricultural Development Strategy for Bohinj 2021–2030." This strategy focuses on the production of high-quality food, the preservation of rural identity, nature conservation, cooperation within the food supply chain, maintaining the identity of the mountain region, integrating agricultural holdings into the tourism offering, and fostering a harmonious coexistence between agriculture and tourism.

Communication of local high-quality products

Providers can receive that certificate for culinary products, dishes and drinks, handcrafted products and products in contemporary design, guided experiences, accommodations, and events. The certification system allows the creation of a verified register of providers and a list of high-quality products, which are promoted through Bohinj Tourism channels.

Currently there are 200 culinary products, 70 dishes and drinks at 12 inns, 130 artisan products and industrial design products, 35 guided experiences and 6 accommodation providers. Target groups are coming from the tourists because there are only 5.000 people living in the region



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Traditional landraces sharpen the profile

To sharpen the brand's profile, promote biodiversity, and provide new impetus for the local culinary scene, the Slovenian association of "Bohinj Meat" producers has entered into a partnership with the regional umbrella brand and is working closely with the Bohinj tourism organization. Furthermore, the network promotes the marketing of meat from the Cika cattle—known in Slovenian as "cikasto govedo"—the only surviving indigenous Slovenian cattle breed, which originates from the Bohinj region.

„Julian Alps - JA 100% Local"

Beside the „Bohinjsko/From Bohinj" regional brand, the "JA 100% Local Initiative" (Julijske Alpe - 100% lokalno) is a local supply chain project, that connects local farmers, food producers, and restaurateurs to boost local self-sufficiency and reduce the carbon footprint of tourism.

The project aims to shorten supply chains through direct deliveries of fresh vegetables, grains, and dairy products—from local producers to restaurants and catering businesses in the area. It focuses on market integration by promoting local direct-sales outlets, thereby making fresh, regional produce accessible to both locals and tourists. Today, 57 producers and 16 buyers are part of this local value chain.

São Pedro do Sul - a centre of bean varieties in Portugal

The central region of Portugal, particularly the mountainous area around S. Pedro do Sul, is known for its distinct traditions and great variety of beans. With around 25 different bean varieties, this area preserves an important genetic heritage and is actively committed to its conservation.



Two seed collections have been established—one in 2014, titled "Agriculture and Rural Development: Biodiversity and Health Promotion," and another in 2023, titled "Between Beans and Other Species from the Gardens of S. Pedro do Sul"—which provide insight into the varieties cultivated and the locations where they are grown. The collecting and preservation of seeds are distinct traditions that form part of women's work. Samples of bean varieties are already on display at the local tourism office.

Coordination by the municipality

The area around S. Pedro do Sul takes pride in its rich tradition of preserving and valuing its significant genetic and cultural heritage. The municipality plays a vital role in coordinating

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various activities aimed at safeguarding this legacy.

The yearly bean festival

One of the highlights of this preservation effort is the annual bean festival, organized by the municipality in collaboration with local producers, tourism initiatives, and gastronomy enthusiasts. During the festival, local



farmers and residents come together to celebrate their shared heritage by tasting traditional bean dishes and recipes presented by various village associations. Beans from more than 20 producers who are unable to attend the fair in person are showcased and sold by the municipality. To support these producers, the municipality actively collects their beans and provides monetary support to encourage the cultivation of local varieties. Over time, the festival has grown into a cherished yearly event, fostering a sense of community, strengthening local identity, and bringing people closer together. This initiative helps sustain the production of these traditional beans.

Local labelling and the local farmer market

In the Viseu-Dão-Lafões sub-region, a specialized local labelling system has been developed to promote the unique identity of vegetables and fruits grown by local farmers. The municipality of São Pedro do Sul has adapted this labelling for use at its local farmer market. This label aims to encourage the consumption of locally produced goods, stimulate the local economy, and promote a territorial food identity. By emphasizing local products, the initiative highlights the cultural and historical significance of these goods.

The direct sale of beans and other fresh local products from farmers to consumers offers numerous benefits. Not only does it eliminate intermediaries, ensuring better prices for both farmers and buyers, but it also provides opportunities to share the history and unique qualities of these local varieties. Additionally, this direct interaction creates meaningful and memorable experiences for consumers and visitors, further strengthening the connection between the community and its agricultural heritage.



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Champagne rye value chain in the Upper Lusatian Biosphere Reserve (Germany)

Champagne rye was a forgotten grain variety since the 1960s and brought back from the gene bank to the field by VERN association in 1994. Today Champagne rye is still in the "Red List of endangered native crops in



Germany". The old variety has proven to be particularly suitable for the dry, barren sandy soils of Upper Lusatia and delivers stable yields even in drought. It is flourishing without the use of mineral fertilizers or chemical plant protection. This provides not only economic benefits but various advantages for the water management and can contribute to buffering cultivation during climate extremes. Today, five farms in the region grow more than 250 hectares of the local rye variety.

Building-up a regional value chain in the Upper Lusatia

In 2007 the Upper Lusatian Heath and Pond Landscape Biosphere Reserve started with its project of building-up a regional value chain with old grain varieties. In cooperation with the VERN association, nine farmers received seeds from the biosphere reserve under the condition of reproduction of grain. A mill and about 20 bakeries are involved in the successful regional value chain. Regional bakery products, beer, and spirits are currently sold. The biosphere reserve is still in the position of a coordinator and looking for more value chain partners

Rätze mill: a value chain key partner

The local Rätze Mill in Spittwitz, operated by brothers Johannes and Sebastian Unger, produces around 300 tons of Champagne rye flour annually, about 5% of their total production. To compensate for the lower yields of this crop, the farmers can receive higher payments, and the price of



Champagne rye flour is approximately 40% higher than that of regular rye flour. The flours and baking mixes are not only used by regional bakeries but are also available for purchase in the mill's own shop, as well as in the regional product sections of local Rewe and Edeka supermarkets. Since



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2025, there has also been a "Rätze-Mühle" online shop, through which the mill's products are successfully sold directly to end consumers. Beyond its economic significance, the initiative has strengthened the community's connection to the region, fostered biodiversity, and contributed to enhancing the region's overall image.

Champagne rye wiskey from Christian Lissina

Christian Lissina grows Champagne rye on his farmland within the biosphere region. To increase the value of his produce, he decided a few years ago to use this high-quality grain to create various spirits. His product range includes spirits such as "Schlesischer Heidekorn" (Silesian heath grain spirit), as well as various fruit brandies and herbal liqueurs. His premium offering is a rye whiskey, that is aged in barrels for several years. He produces



around 300 litres annually and successfully sells it through a small specialty shop in the nearby city of Bautzen.

Traditional maize varieties and local „Broa" diversity in Central Portugal

In many villages across central and northern Portugal, old granaries, known as 'canastros' or 'espigueiros', still bear witness today to a long tradition of maize cultivation and the significant role this crop played in the diet of the local population. As part of a research project, 51 distinct local maize varieties, along with 175 other associated crop species, were documented across 11 municipalities. Historically, the economy of these regions was based on small-scale farming, with maize serving as a staple ingredient for the production of 'Broa', a traditional Portuguese cornbread. Each municipality possessed its own specific maize varieties and cultivation methods, which were reflected in the composition, shape, size, and flavor of the locally produced 'Broa'.

Breeding resources and agroecosystem capacity

The huge diversity of diverse maize landraces collected in a small geographical region denoted adaptation to the broad range of



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climate conditions over the terrain in Central and Northern Portugal. These landraces have been selected all over the centuries by man and nature. The genetic diversity found in traditional landraces is invaluable for future breeding efforts and agroecosystem adaptability. This genetic heritage serves as a reservoir of traits such as disease resistance and climate adaptability, which are essential for future breeding programs. Moreover, these landraces enhance the adaptive capacity and stability of intercropping and polycropping systems in agroecological farming practices.

Saving the Broa taste of history in Portugal

The traditional maize landraces agricultural systems are changing. Local maize landraces are in risk of disappearing because of being less productive, leading farmers to favour hybrid maize varieties that are less



suitable for baking. The diverse forms of traditional Broa offer visitors a taste of history and a view into the finely structured communities of Central and Northern Portugal. It is worth for visitors paying a price premium to experience that typical and authentic high-quality bread and for local residents to uphold that valuable element of regional identity.

Tepka pears in Julian Alp village of Zasip (Slovenia)

Another impressive example is the successful preserving of the traditional pear variety Tepka with its cultural history in the village of Zasip in the Julian Alps region of Slovenia, and its integration into regional culinary



practices. In the 18th century Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa wanted to reduce a famine by planting crops, particularly in poor areas; one of the approaches were planting Tepka pear trees. In this history Zasip became the centre for preparing a huge variety of dishes based on this very special type of pear. These high-stem orchard pears are not consumed fresh but are dried for use as flour or stuffing, cooked into compotes, or processed into pear brandy.

Prga flour as a basis for traditional and innovative local dishes

The dried pears and its sweet flour (Prga) are traditionally used for bread or as a filling for dumplings. Today "Prga" is used in a huge variety of tasty dishes and sweets and have found its way into high gastronomy of the Julian Alp region. And, the dried pears are grinding into a powder that can be used instead of wheat flour. Bread is baked from it, as are a variety of pastries. A good gastronomic example is the restaurant Kurej in Zasip, that is offering a tasting menu featuring

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dishes made with Tepka pears, illustrating best practices in linking local producers with the gastronomic offer.

Tepka pear brandy from the Trglav family farm

Another good example of successful valuing the traditional Tepka pear variety is the local production of Tepkovec schnapps, made of fermented and distilled pears. The Trglav family farm is just some hundred meters from the centre of Zasip, where Andreja Pogačar produces the high-quality pear brandy and liqueurs based on long-standing tradition. But is not only Tepkovec the family is producing. They have more than thirty different flavours of schnapps, from traditional versions like Smrekovec, that is flavoured with soft, young spruce tips.

Pear orchard meadows: extensive use and care of traditional landscape

Bojana Pipan from Zasip is not only grandmother of cooking with Prga flour, but she organises the collective harvesting and drying of Tepka pear with the 20 farmers that are owning the old pear orchards, with trees dating back to the 18th century. These extensive orchard meadows with grassland represent cultural habitats with high biodiversity and valuable



ecosystems that contribute to good soil water balance and CO_2-storage. This demonstrates how traditional practices, when preserved through active use, maintain both ecological and cultural heritage and traditional cultural landscape for contemporary and future generations.

Red Mountain cattle in Upper Lusatian land care (Germany)

Since 2013, the Upper Lusatia Biosphere Reserve, in collaboration with the agricultural and landscape management enterprise "Agrarproduktion und Landschafts-pflege Mönau-Uhyst," has been working to conserve and propagate the traditional landrace breed known as "Rotes Höhenvieh" (Red Upland Cattle). Historically, this breed served a triple purpose: it provided milk and meat, and functioned as a draft animal. By focusing on landscape management and promoting the value of the meat, the partners have succeeded in increasing the herd size



from four animals in 2013 to 60 in 2025.

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On-farm processing and direct marketing

The Mönau-Uhyst farm sells its meat directly on-site. Since the slaughter and processing of meat products from these extensively raised animals take place only on



specific dates, on-farm sales are largely seasonal. Further, local producers offer their regional meat and sausage products at two major farmers' markets, held in the spring and autumn, which are organized by the Biosphere reserve on their areal in Wartha.

Furthermore, the Biosphere reserve administration supports the marketing of the meat to restaurants within the biosphere region. The biosphere reserve administration has produced an informational flyer for guests and made it available to these restaurants; this makes it easier for the establishments to highlight the unique qualities of meat dishes featuring "Red Mountain" beef and to introduce them to their guests.

Maintaining grassland and moist habitats biodiversity

In the Upper Lusatia Biosphere Reserve, herds of red cattle are used for nature-oriented landscape management. These robust animals are employed specifically for grazing, helping to keep wetlands and designated protected areas open. They prevent valuable meadows from becoming overgrown with scrub and promote local biodiversity. This form of extensive grazing preserves grasslands, increases the organic matter content in the soil, and contributes to both carbon sequestration and soil health.

Traditional carp from pond farming in Upper Lusatia (Germany)

Carp farming in Upper Lusatia has an over 750 years tradition, making the region around the UNESCO Biosphere reserve one of the largest pond areas in Europe. The first ponds were established during the Middle Ages to meet the demand for fasting foods, particularly for monasteries and the nobility. Carp farming reached its peak in the 15th and 16th centuries.



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Seasonal marketing in farm shops and the Lusatian fish week

Today, the focus lies on combining economic efficiency, regional marketing, and nature conservation. The traditional Lusatian breed is the mirror carp. Various pond farms operate in the Upper Lusatian heath and pond landscape with direct marketing of smoked fish in their small farm shops. Their offerings vary seasonally, as carp in particular, traditionally has its peak season during the cooler months.The highlight of the year is the Lusatian Fish Weeks in autumn. During this time, numerous fish farmers and local restaurateurs invite visitors to experience the traditional fish harvest and participate in regional carp events.

Lika lamb in Zadar region of Croatia

The Lika Pramenka is an indigenous breed of sheep from the mountainous Lika and Gorski Kotar regions of Croatia. Renowned for its resilience and adaptability to the rugged, rocky pastures, this curly-coated breed forms the foundation for the Lika lamb, which has been awarded Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status in the European Union. The lambs are known for the unique taste of their meat, which is attributed to their diet of mountain herbs and vegetation during summer pasture grazing.

The branding and reintroduction of Lika lamb products in restaurants, gastronomic events and food festivals gave the communities a sense of reputation that shapes regional



identity. Agro-tourism services bring visitors in contact with rural communities. Gastronomic events with such local dishes in restaurants boost both tourism and community pride.

LEADER region“Bura” Zadar, Croatia

The LEADER region "Bura" Zadar, located in northern Dalmatia, Croatia between the Adriatic coast and the Velebit mountain range. This region covers several rural municipalities which together form an area of traditional agricultural practices, natural beauty, and cultural heritage.

Traditional agriculture in this region thrives with practices such as olive growing, fig production, sheep farming, and small-scale family farming. These activities are closely connected with traditional knowledge and farming practices that have been passed on through generations. The primary production in the area includes family farms and cultivation and processing of traditional varieties in the fields of olives, grapes as well as meat and milk of extensive grazing sheep.

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Role of LEADER LAG Management

The LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) plays an important role in the coordination of the rural development activities between the involved municipalities and their interest groups. The LAG management responsibilities include:

- information and advice for the nine partner municipalities,
- co-ordination between the projects and the municipalities activities,
- facilitating access to EU and national funding opportunities.

The basis of cooperation within the region lies in the LEADER strategy plan, which brings together all partners in agreement on a common idea and measures that support the development of the region.

Traditional landraces as a LEADER regions funding criteria

The strategic plan of LEADER Region of Bura provides a program for investment in agricultural production and processing that contribute to improved economic sustainability and the quality of agricultural products.



Farmers can receive project funding with an amount from 5.000€ until 30.000€. One of the central criteria of project selection is the involvement of traditional landraces such as Croatian autochthone goat breeds for land care and meat production.

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